The Younger Set

By ROBERT W. CHAMBERS,

Author of "The Fighting Chance," Etc.

"Thorns and prickles, please," she said, and he took her hand in his and proceeded to extract them while she looked down at her almost invisble wounds, tenderly amused at his fear of hurting her.

"Do you know," she said, "that people are beginning to open their houses yonder?" She nodded toward the west. "The Minsters are on the way to Brookminster, the Orchils have already arrived at Hitherwood House and the coachmen and horses were housed at Southlawn last night. I rather dread the dinners and country formality that always interfere with the jolly times we have, but it will be rather good fun at the bathing beach. Do you swim well? But of course you do."

"Pretty well. Do you?"

"I'm a fish. Gladys Orchil and I would never leave the surf if they didn't literally drag us home. You know Gladys Orchil? She's very nice. So is Sheila Minster. You'll like her better in the country than you do in town. Kathleen Lawn is nice too. Alas! I see many a morning where Drina and I twirl our respective thumbs while you and Boots are off with a gayer set.

"Oh, don't interrupt! No mortal man is proof against Sheila and Gladys and Kathleen, and you're not a demigod, are you? Thank you for your surgery upon my thumb." She naively placed the tip of it between her lips and looked at him, standing there like a schoolgirl in her fresh gown, burnished hair loosened and curling in riotous beauty across cheeks and ears.

He had seated himself on the wheelbarrow again. She stood looking down at him, hands now bracketed on her narrow hips so close that the fresh fragrance of her grew faintly perceptible, a delicate atmosphere of youth mingling with the perfume of the young garden.

Nina, basket on her arm, snipping away with her garden shears, glanced over her shoulder—and went on snipping. They did not notice how far away her agricultural ardor led her—did not notice when she stood a moment at the gate looking back at them or when she passed out, pretty head bent thoughtfully, the shears swinging loose at her girdle.

"You are very like a boy sometimes," said Eileen—"as young as Gerald, I often think, especially when your hat is off. You always look so perfectly groomed. I wonder—I wonder what you would look like if your hair were rumpled."

"Try it," he suggested lazily.

"I? I don't think I dare." She raised her hand, hesitated, the gay daring in her eyes deepening to audacity. "Shall I?"

"Why not?"

"T-touch your hair—rumple it, as I would Gerald's? I'm tempted to—only—only"—

"What?"

"I don't know. I couldn't. I—it was only the temptation of a second." She laughed uncertainly. The suggestion of the intimacy tinted her cheeks with its reaction. She took a short step backward. Instinct, blindly stirring, sobered her, and as the smile faded from eye and lip his face changed too. And far, very far away in the silent cells of his heart a distant pulse awoke.

"Have you misunderstood me?" she asked in a low voice.

"How, child?"

"I don't know. Shall we walk a little?"

When they came to the stone fish pond she seated herself for a moment on a marble bench, then, curiously restless, rose again, and again they moved forward at hazard, past the spouting fountain, which was a driven well, out of which a crystal column of water rose geyser-like, dazzling in the westering sun rays.

"Nina tells me that this water rises in the Connecticut hills," he said, "and flows as a subterranean sheet under the sound, spouting up here on Long Island when you drive a well."

She looked at the column of flashing water, nodding silent assent.

They moved on, the girl curiously reserved, noncommunicative, head slightly lowered, the man vague eyed, thoughtful, pacing slowly at her side. Behind them their long shadows trailed across the brilliant grass.

Traversing the grove which encircled the newly clipped lawn, now fragrant with sun crisped grass tips left in the wake of the mower, he mentioned moonlight.

She glanced up, then away from him.

"You seem to be enamored of the moonlight," she said.

"I like to prowl in it."

"Alone?"

"Sometimes."

"And—at other times?"

He laughed. "Oh, I'm past the spooning age. Are you glad?"

She halted. "Yes, because I'm quite sure of you if you are; I mean that I can always keep you for myself. Can't I?"

She was smiling, and her eyes were clear and fearless, but there was a wild rose tint on her cheeks which deepened a little as he turned short in his tracks, gazing straight at her.

"You wish to keep me—for yourself?" he repeated, laughing.

"Yes, Captain Selwyn."

"Until you marry. Is that it, Eileen?"

"Yes, until I marry."

"And then we'll let each other go. Is that it?"

"Yes; but I think I told you that I would never marry. Didn't I?"

"Oh! Then ours is to be a lifelong and anti-sentimental contract!"

"Yes, unless you marry."

"I promise not to," he said, "unless you do."

"I promise not to," she said gayly, "unless you do."

"There remains," he observed, "but one way for you and I ever to marry anybody. And, as I'm hors concours, even that hope is ended."

She flushed; her lips parted, but she checked what she had meant to say, and they walked forward together in silence for awhile until she had made up her mind what to say and how to express it.

"Captain Selwyn, there are two things that you do which seem to me unfair. You still have at times that faraway, absent expression which excludes me, and when I venture to break the silence you have a way of answering, 'Yes, child,' and 'No, child,' as though you were inattentive and I had not yet become an adult. That is my first complaint! What are you laughing at? It is true, and it confuses and hurts me, because I know I am intelligent enough and old enough to—to be treated as a woman—a woman attractive enough to be reckoned with! But I never seem to be wholly so to you."

The laugh died out as she ended. For a moment they stood there confronting one another.

"Do you imagine," he said in a low voice, "that I do not know all that?"

"I don't know whether you do. For all your friendship—for all your liking and your kindness to me—somehow—I—I don't seem to stand with you as other women do. I don't seem to stand their chances."

"What chances?"

"The—the consideration. You don't call any other woman 'child,' do you? You don't constantly remind other women of the difference in your ages, do you? You don't feel with other women that you are, as you please to call it, hors concours—out of the running. And somehow with me it humiliates, because, even if I am the sort of girl who never means to marry, you—your attitude seems to take away the possibility of my changing my mind. It dictates to me, giving me no choice, no liberty, no personal freedom in the matter. It's as though you considered me somehow utterly out of the question—radically unthinkable as a woman. And you assume to take for granted that I also regard you as—as hors concours. Those are my grievances, Captain Selwyn. And I don't regard you so. And I—and it troubles me to be excluded—to be found wanting, inadequate in anything that a woman should be. I know that you and I have no desire to marry each other, but—but please don't make the reason for it either your age or my physical immaturity or intellectual inexperience."

One of those weather stained seats of Georgia marble stood imbedded under the trees near where she had halted, and she seated herself, outwardly composed and inwardly a little frightened at what she had said.

As for Selwyn, he remained where he had been standing on the lawn's velvet edge, and, raising her eyes again, her heart misgave her that she had wantonly strained a friendship which had been all but perfect, and now he was moving across the patl toward her, a curious look in his face which she could not interpret. She looked up as he approached and stretched out her hand.

"Forgive me, Captain Selwyn," she said. "I am a child—a spoiled one—and I have proved it to you. Will you sit here beside me and tell me very gently what a fool I am to risk straining the friendship dearest to me in the whole world? And will you fix my penance?"

"You have fixed it yourself," he said.

"How?"

"By the challenge of your womanhood."

"I did not challenge."

"No; you defended. You are right. The girl I cared for—the girl who was there with me on Brier Water—so many, many centuries ago—the girl who, years ago, leaned there beside me on the sundial—has become a memory."

"What do you mean?" she asked faintly.

"Shall I tell you?"

"Yes."

"You will not be unhappy if I tell you?"

"N-no."

"Have you any idea what I am going to say, Eileen?"

She looked up quickly, frightened at the tremor in his voice.

"Don't—don't say it, Captain Selwyn!"

"Will you listen as a penance?"

"I—no, I cannot."

He said quietly: "I was afraid you could not listen. You see, Eileen, that, after all, a man does know when he is done for."

"Captain Selwyn!" She turned and caught his hands in both of hers, her eyes bright with tears. "Is that the penalty for what I said? Did you think I invited this?"

"Invited! No, child," he said gently. "I was fool enough to believe in myself; that is all. I have always been on the edge of loving you. Only in dreams did I ever dare set foot across that frontier. Now I have dared. I love you. That is all, and it must not distress you."

"But it does not," she said. "I have always loved you—dearly, dearly. Not in that way. I don't know how. Must it be in that way, Captain Selwyn? Can we not go on in the other way—that dear way which I—I have—almost spoiled? Must we be like other people—must sentiment turn it all to commonplace? Listen to me. I do love you. It is perfectly easy and simple to say it. But it is not emotional; it is not sentimental. Won't you take me for what I am and as I am—a girl, still young, devoted to you with all her soul, happy with you, believing implicitly in you, deeply, deeply sensible of your goodness and sweetness and loyalty to her? I am not a woman. I was a fool to say so. But you—you are so overwhelmingly a man that if it were in me to love—in that way—it would be you! Do you understand me? Or have I lost a friend? Will you forgive my foolish boast? Can you still keep me first in your heart, as you are in mine, and pardon in me all that I am not? Can you do these things because I ask you?"

"Yes," he said.

Chapter 19

GERALD came to Silverside two or three times during the early summer, arriving usually on Friday and always remaining until the following Monday morning.

All his youthful admiration and friendship for Selwyn had returned. That was plainly evident, and with it something less of callow self sufficiency. He did not appear to be as cocksure of himself and the world as he had been. There was less bumptiousness about him, less aggressive complacency. Somewhere and somehow somebody or something had come into collision with him, but who or what this had been he did not offer to confide in Selwyn, and the older man dreading to disturb the existing accord between them, forbore to question him or invite, even indirectly, any confidence not offered. Selwyn and Eileen also noticed that he became very restless toward the end of his visits at Silverside, as though something in the city awaited him—some duty or responsibility not entirely pleasant.

There was, too, something of soberness, amounting at moments to discontented listlessness, not solitary brooding, for at such moments he stuck to Selwyn, following him about and remaining rather close to him, as though the elder man's mere presence was a comfort, even a protection.

So their relations remained during the early summer, and everybody supposed that Gerald's two weeks' vacation would be spent there at Silverside. Apparently the boy himself thought so, too, for he made some plans ahead, and Austin sent down a very handsome new motor boat for him.

Then at the last minute a telegram arrived saying that he had sailed for Newport on Neergard's big yacht. And for two weeks no word was received from him at Silverside.

One day in September Selwyn wrote Gerald, asking him to bring Edgerton Lawn and come down to Silverside for the purpose of witnessing some experiments with the new smokeless explosive, chasolte.

Young Lawn came by the first train. Gerald wired that he would arrive the following morning.

He did arrive, unusually pallid, almost haggard, and Selwyn, who met him at the station and drove him over from Wyossett, ventured at last to give the boy a chance.

But Gerald remained utterly unresponsive, stolidly so, and the other instantly relinquished the hope of any

Neergard.

confidence at that time, shifting the conversation at once to the object and reason of Gerald's coming and gayly expressing his belief that the time was very near at hand when chasoite would figure heavily in the world's list of commercially valuable explosives.

It was early in August that Selwyn had come to the conclusion that his chasoite was likely to prove a commercial success. And now, in September, his experiments had advanced so far that he had ventured to invite Austin, Gerald, Lansing and Edgerton Lawn of the Lawn Nitro Powder company to witness a few tests at his cottage laboratory on Storm head, but at the same time he informed them with characteristic modesty that he was not yet prepared to guarantee the explosive.

He froze chasoite and boiled it and baked it and melted it and took all sorts of hair raising liberties with it, and after that he ground it to a powder, placed a few generous pinches in a small hand grenade and affixed a primer, the secret composition of which he alone knew. That was the key to the secret—the composition of the primer charge.

"I used to play baseball in college," he observed, smiling, "and I used to be a pretty good shot with a snowball."

They followed him to the cliff's edge, always with great respect for the awful stuff he handled with such apparent carelessness. There was a black, sea soaked rock jutting out above the waves. Selwyn pointed at it, poised himself and, with the long, overhand, straight throw of a trained ball player, sent the grenade like a bullet at the rock.

(To be continued.)

RESTORED CONFIDENCE

Is Evident From Increased Orders For Immediate Delivery.

New York, [illegible]—R. G. Dun & Company's weekly review of trade says: Decided improvement is noted in most trade reports this week, especially in respect to distributive departments. Orders have come to manufacturers more freely, in many cases accompanied by requests for immediate delivery. Evidences of increased confidence are numerous and prices are more firmly held where concessions have been offered recently without attracting buyers. Many mills have resumed after months of idleness, sufficient orders having accumulated to assure active capacity during the balance of the year, and there is general belief that contracts will be placed freely during the next two months.

Recent moderate reductions in prices of pig iron and the large amount of steel business about to be placed have resulted in increased inquiry for material. Purchases are no longer confined to immediate needs, deliveries during the first quarter of 1909 being arranged, and still longer contracts could be taken if producers would name current prices. Orders for steel rails are being placed for both home and export account, some idle plants having secured enough business to resume operations, while plate mills are busy on materials for recent big orders for cars. Minor metals are firmer because of a decidedly broader demand.